

HONEST DEALING WITH GOD

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A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”
1 John 1:8, 9, 10.

“GOD is light, and in Him is no darkness at all,” and consequently He cannot have fellowship with darkness. God is light, that is purity, and as the thrice Holy One, He can hold no communion with iniquity. God is light, that is knowledge, for all things are known unto the Lord, and with ignorance He has no affinity. God is light, that is truth, for He can neither err, nor break His word and therefore, He cannot smile on anything that is false. We are constantly erring, first on this side and then on that, for there is darkness in us. God is essentially light and it is not possible for His nature to be affected by either impurity or error. Out of this attribute of His nature arises the fact that the Lord always deals with things as they are. Man invents fictions, but God creates facts. We conceive of things as they appear, but God sees them as they exist. “Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.” The dress of things impresses *us*, but all things are naked and open before *Him*. The Lord never misrepresents, nor has fellowship with misrepresentation. We are forever hurrying about with our paint and varnish and tinsel—laboring to make the meaner thing appear equal to the more precious—and spending our skill in making the sham seem as brilliant as the reality. But all this is contrary to the way of the Lord. Everything is true in God and everything is seen in its reality by His all-discerning eyes. Because He is light, He deals with things in the light, treating them as they are. If God is to deal graciously with us, we must, each one, stand in the light, and present ourselves before Him as we are. If there is on our lips a false word, or in our heart a false thought, or in our mind a knowingly false judgment, we are out of the sphere in which God can have fellowship with us. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth.”

Yet, dear friends, the natural tendency of our heart is to try and appear to be what we are not. We all have, more or less, to struggle against this tendency, for it assails the most truthful. That love of approval, which, rightly checked and kept in order, has its uses, very often pushes men on to pretend to be better than they are. Fear of censure is an equally powerful means of producing hypocrisy. We must, by all means, strive against the very beginnings of this frightful evil, for if it should ever get the mastery over us it will make us altogether untruthful, and consequently, we shall be far removed from all power to walk with God. The Lord cannot stand with us on the platform of seeming and appearance, but only on the ground of what we really are. Therefore, in proportion as we are untrue, we cut ourselves off from God.

Our tendency to be false is illustrated in the chapter before us, for we find three grades of it there. There is first *the man who lies*—“If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” We say and do that which is untrue if, while abiding under the influence of sin and falsehood, we claim to have fellowship with God. If this tendency is left alone and unchecked, you will find the man growing worse and doing according to the eighth verse, in which it is written, “We deceive ourselves.” Here the utterer of the falsehood has come to *believe his own lie*. He has blinded his understanding and befouled his conscience till he has become his own dupe. Falsehood has saturated his nature so that he puts darkness for light and light for darkness. This is, at once, his sin and his punishment. He closed his eyes so long that, at length, he has become stone blind. He will soon reach the complete development of his sin which is described in the tenth verse, when the man, who first lied and then, secondly, deceived himself, becomes so audacious in his falseness as to *blaspheme the Most Holy by mak-*

ing Him a liar. It is impossible to say where sin will end. The beginning of it is as a little water in which a bird may wash and scatter half the pool in drops. But in its progress, sin like the brook swells into a torrent deep and broad. We must, therefore, judge ourselves very severely. If we do not, our natural tendency to falseness will lead us to false assertion as to ourselves and urge us on till we delude ourselves into the foolish belief that we are what we proudly represent ourselves to be. And then our sin escalates, in the desperation of our pride, to a point where we think God Himself is untrue.

Our only safe course—and may the Spirit of God grant us grace to follow it—is to come to God as we actually are and ask Him to deal with us in Christ Jesus according to our actual condition. If we are to walk with God at all, it must be in the light. And if we once walk in the light with Him, our condition will tally with the description of verse seven—we shall see sin in ourselves and daily feel the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us. Only on the footing of sin daily confessed and pardoned can there be any fellowship between us and the eternal God this side of heaven, for that footing is the only one consistent with the facts of the case. Let us daily ask the Lord to keep us in a truthful spirit, admitting the truth, both concerning ourselves and our Lord, feeling its power, and desiring to be taught still more of it. Let us pray Him to deal with us, not according to our suppositions, but according to the facts, and let us entreat Him never to allow us to rejoice in fancied blessings, such as might satisfy our proud, half-stupefied conscience, but to give to us the real blessings of genuine forgiveness and effectual cleansing from all unrighteousness.

I intend at this time, as God may help us, first, to *consider the three courses* which lie open before us in the text; then, secondly, to *consider how to follow in the right course*; and thirdly, it shall be my endeavor to lead you to *consider why you should do so*.

I. LET US CONSIDER THE THREE COURSES laid open before us in the text.

I will suppose that we are all earnestly anxious to be in fellowship with God. We cannot bear to be His enemies any longer. Distance from Him has become distasteful to us. We long, like the prodigal son, to arise and go to our Father that we may hereafter dwell in our Father's house. Our deceitful heart suggests to us, first, that we should *deny our present sinfulness*, and so claim fellowship with God on the grounds that we are holy and so may draw near to the Holy God. It is suggested to our hearts that we should say that, "We have no sin," and are neither guilty by act nor defiled in nature. This is a bold assertion and he who makes it has no truth in him, but at different times and by very different persons it has been made and stoutly maintained. There are many ways in which this proud saying has been justified. Some have arrived at it by denying altogether the doctrine of original sin, "as the Pelagians do vainly talk." They will not admit that there is a fault and natural corruption in the nature of every man whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness and therefore is of his own nature, inclined to evil. Now we, I trust, will always be clear from this doctrinal error, for we know, as David did, that we were shaped in iniquity and are—

*"Sprung from the man whose desperate fall
Corrupts the blood, and taints us all."*

I do not suppose that many of you are likely to say you have no sin on the ground of a disbelief of natural depravity, for many of you know this truth, not merely as a matter of creed, but as a terrible fact which has come home to you and caused you great sorrow. If, however, any of you should venture to plead that you have no sin on the ground that your nature is not evil, I do beseech you to rid your heart of that lie, for a lie it is, through and through. I don't care how honest your parents are, or how noble your ancestry was—there is in you a bias towards evil. Your animal passions, no, more—your mental faculties are unhinged and out of order—and unless some power beyond your own shall keep your desires in check, you will soon prove by overt acts of transgression the depravity of your nature.

It is not uncommon for others to arrive at the same conclusion by another road. They have the audacity to say that they have no sin by feelings and beliefs which they, as a rule, ascribe to the Holy Spirit. Now, if any man says that all tendency to sin is gone from him, that his heart is at all times perfect, and his desires always pure so that he has no sin in him whatsoever, he may have traveled a very different road from the character we just now warned you about, but he has reached the same conclusion and we have but one word for both boasters, it is the word of our text, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Some, however, have reached this position by another route. They plead that though it may be they have sin, yet they are not bad at heart. They look upon *sin* as a technical term and though they admit, in words, that they have sin, yet they practically deny it by saying, “I have a good heart at bottom. I always was well-intentioned from the very first. True, what I have done does not appear to be right according to the very severe judgement of the law of God, but I cannot help that. I only followed my nature and cannot be blamed, for I never meant to do anything wrong, either to God or man. I have always been kind to the poor and have done the right thing all round. I know I have erred—of course we all have—here and there, but you cannot expect a fellow to be perfect. I can’t say I see anything to find fault with in men.” Thus you in effect say you have no sin. Though you compliment God by saying with the church service, “We are miserable sinners,” you do not mean it at all. You mean that if you have sinned, it has been your misfortune and you are to be pitied rather than blamed. In so saying or feeling, you prove that the truth is not in you—you are either deplorably ignorant as to what holiness is, or else you are willfully uttering a lie. In either, case the truth is not in you.

A fourth sort of persons say the same thing, for albeit they confess that they have sinned, they think themselves now to be in a proper and fit condition to receive pardon. “We have prayed,” they say. “We have repented; we have read the Scriptures; we have attended public worship and are as right as we can be. We have tenderness, contrition, and every right and proper feeling—our wonder is that we do not receive salvation.” It would be a very great wonder to me if you did. It does not matter how you got there, you have virtually come to the same place as the others of whom I have spoken, for you believe that there is nothing about you which can operate against your salvation. You think you are ripe for mercy, fit for pardon—and what is this but declaring that you are not in a sinful state? All things are ready with *you* and you half insinuate that God is not ready—this is casting the blame of your unbelief upon God and disowning it yourself. According to your ideas, you are a poor innocent whom God delays to bless. You are willing and earnest enough and yet He passes you by—do you really believe this? Then, let me tell you that if any man dreams that he has a fitness or preparation for divine grace, he knows not what he speaks, for in the very nature of things, the only fitness for grace is the need of it. The idea of fitness is only another form of the vain notion of merit and it cannot find an inch of foothold in the gospel. True penitents can see nothing in themselves to commend them to mercy and therefore, they cast themselves upon undeserved favor, feeling both unworthy and unfit, but hoping to receive forgiveness freely.

Whatever shape our denial of our sinful nature and state may take, please remember that that denial is mere *talk* and nothing more—“If *we say* we have no sin.” You know how little value we attach to evidence of the nature of, “I say,” and, “They say.” There may be no truth whatever in such evidence, and in the present case, there is nothing whatever to warrant the proud saying, “We have no sin.” There will come a day when the righteous will have no sin, as a matter of fact, but now, whether saint or sinner, if you say, “I have no sin,” you say it and that is all. The words sound very pretty, but there is no fact to correspond with them.

Moreover, the idea of having no sin is a delusion—you are altogether deceived if you say so—the truth is not in you and you have not seen things in the true light. You must have shut your eyes to the high requirements of the law. You must be a stranger to your own heart. You must be blind to your own conduct and you must have forgotten to search your thoughts and to weigh your motives, or you would have detected the presence of sin. He who cannot find water in the sea is no more foolish than the man who cannot perceive sin in his members. As the salt flavors every drop of the Atlantic, so does sin affect every atom of our nature. It is so sadly there, so abundantly there, that if you cannot detect it, you are deceived.

This self-deceit has arrived by a good deal of persuading and ingenious trickery. To deceive another requires a measure of cunning, but to deceive yourself needs far more. Our deceitful heart reveals an almost Satanic shrewdness in self-deception—it readily enough makes the worse reason to appear to be the best reason—and it states a lie so that it wears the fashion of truth. If you say you have no sin, you have achieved a fearful success—you have put out your own eyes and perverted your own reason! You have fed upon falsehood till it has entered into your very being and rendered you incapable of truth. I know you claim to be very sincere in your belief of your own rightness. And I know it would be very

hard to persuade you differently—and this makes it all the worse—for so much the more completely have you deceived yourself. Now that you call darkness, light, and boast that your blindness is true sight, we mourn over you as all but hopeless. And we fear lest the Lord should leave you to perish because you cling so fast to your lie.

In how many ways men manage to deceive themselves! They can do it by irreligion and by religion, too. They do it by outrageous sin and by boastful sanctity. They can mislead themselves by precious hymns—which rightly understood speak truth, but wrongly turned, speak desperate falsehoods by dwelling upon the work of the Spirit of God—which rightly taken is greatly for our consolation, but taken after the Pharisaic manner may itself be misconstrued and made to furnish wind for the bubble of vainglory. O friends, it is not without effort that men pervert the best things into excuses for pride, yes, turn even their meat into poison. It is not an easy thing to get up to sinlessness, nor is it an easy matter to keep the cheat from collapsing. The baseless fabric must be deftly put together and it will need much propping up and buttressing—it is almost as hard to seem to be as to be—perhaps I might say it is harder. Pity that men should be at such pains to make fools of themselves.

Let it be remembered, however, that while the man who has deceived himself says, “I have no sin,” he has not deceived the Lord. God sees sin in us, if we do not. The ostrich is reported to bury her head in the sand and then to suppose herself safe, but she is the more speedily taken. And we may shut our eyes and say, “I have no sin,” but in so doing, instead of securing eternal salvation, we shall as practically give ourselves up to the destroyer as the bird of the desert is fabled to do. Let a man say, “I have no sin,” and he has condemned himself out of his own mouth, for the text says of such a man the truth is not in him—and he who has not truth in him is not saved. The absence of confession of present sin means the absence of the light of truth and sincerity. God saves all sorts of people, however black their sins, but the man of a false spirit, the Pharisaic washer of the outside of the cup, while the inside is foul, is the last person who is likely to be saved. A main point in conversion consists in a man’s being honest—for it is the honest and good ground which receives the seed. If you preach the gospel among the roughest and most profane of men, there is more hope of success among them than among hypocritical professors. Open enmity and opposition are better than that pretended friendship which begins and ends with the shallow compliments of empty formalism. Outward religiousness, unattended by heart piety, does a man serious injury by rendering him superficial and unreal in all that he does in reference to God—and as God desires truth in the inward parts, He will not parley with dishonest men. Pretend and profess and boast how you will, but understand this—the living God abhors everything which is not according to the strictest truth.

Now, all this may serve for our guidance when seeking the Lord. Awakened sinners often say, “If I could feel my heart was right towards God, then I could believe that He would look upon me in mercy.” How wrong is this! If you felt that all was right, it would be an untruthful feeling, for by nature all is wrong. “Oh, sir,” you say, “if I could but feel that now, at last, I am as I ought to be before God, as tender and as penitent as He would have me to be, then I could have hope.” No, my dear friend, such a feeling would not be according to truth, for no man is as tender and as penitent as he ought to be. And if you felt you were, you would be feeling a *lie*, and so the truth would not be in you. I do not want you to feel that you are what you ought to be. I pray that you may admit that you are *not* what you ought to be. I would have you feel unrest and absence of anything like satisfaction, for such feelings will be according to the truth. I beseech you never claim to experience feelings which you do not feel, nor make hypocritical confessions of sin which you have never committed, nor pretend to a repentance which is not in you, for the Lord hates all shams and will only deal with you according to truth. If you are conscious of impenitence, go to the Lord and tell Him you have a hard heart which will not feel either the terrors of His law or the warmth of His love. In other words, go to Him just as you are and confess what you are, and ask Him to deal with you in Christ Jesus as He sees you to be. That is the only way—the plan of pretending that we are now free from sin will not work and bring us blessing, for, “We deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

The second course which is open to us is the one which I trust the divine Spirit may lead us to follow, *to lay bare our case before God exactly as it stands*. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity.” Please observe that John does not say, “If we

confess our *sin*.” He had been speaking of that in the 8th verse, but here he uses the plural, to include both sin in its essence and in its actual development in our life. We are to confess both the inward sin and the outward fruit of it. We must say, “Lord, I admit with shame that as my nature is corrupt, such has my life been. I am a sinner both by nature and by practice.” Make the confession of the two things, of the cause and the effect, of the original depravity—the foul source—and then of the actual sin which is the polluted stream. And if you say, “How am I to confess it?” I would say this—To confess sin does not mean merely on some one occasion to repeat a catalog of sins before God in private, nor at certain set seasons to rehearse a list of our faults—it means a life-long acknowledgment of our sin. We must take our places as they who have sinned and never attempt to occupy the position of innocent beings. We are to look towards God as a man ought to look who has transgressed. Do you understand me? The Pharisee took up the posture and spirit of a man who had no sin in him and said, “God, I thank You.” He was not confessing sin, but claiming righteousness—and he was not accepted because he was out of the light—that is to say, he was not speaking and feeling according to truth. But the publican, though he said little and made no confession of sin in detail, yet by his posture—by his striking his breast, by his not daring to look up, by the sigh which he heaved—was virtually confessing sin. When a man prayerfully begs that he may feel the power of the blood of Jesus, he is confessing sin, for is not the blood of Jesus necessary because of our sin? The daily exercise of faith in Jesus Christ is a confession of sin, for nobody would need to believe in a Savior unless he had sin. Baptism is a confession of sin—who needs to be buried with Christ if he is alive by a righteousness of his own? To come to the communion table and remember there the atoning sacrifice is a confession of sin—we would need no remembrance of our blessed Substitute if we were not sinners. Confession of sin is best carried out when we deal with God as those who have offended Him, not as those who feel that they are innocent. We are to act before the Lord as those who know that sin is in them. And how ought such to behave? They will walk with God very humbly and watchfully. They will be jealous lest inbred corruption should get the mastery of them. Such persons will daily cry to the strong for strength, and what is prayer for strength but a confession of weakness caused by sin? What is watchfulness but a confession that our nature still needs holding in check? So ought we to watch as those who feel that the battle is not fought, and therefore, we cannot lay down our armor or our sword. We should so live as those who know that the race is not run, and therefore, they press forward. We ought to be prayerfully dependent upon God, as those who know that if they were left by divine grace, they would go back unto perdition.

When a sinner feels he has no natural fitness for receiving the grace of God, when a broken spirit cries, “Oh, what a wretch I am! Not only my past sin but my present feelings disqualify me for the love of God. I seem to be made of hell-hardened steel.” I think I hear him sighing—

*“The rocks can rend; the earth can quake;
The seas can roar; the mountains shake—
Of feeling, all things show some sign,
But this unfeeling heart of mine!
To hear the sorrows You have felt,
Dear Lord, an adamant would melt.
But I can read each moving line
And nothing moves this heart of mine!
Your judgments, too, unmoved I hear,
Amazing thought which devils fear!
Goodness and wrath in vain combine
To stir this stupid heart of mine.”*

Now, this piteous outcry because all is wrong within is virtually a confession of sin and a truthful one, too, for *all is wrong*. If you feel you are desperately bad, remember you are worse than you think you are. Your case is, in itself, desperate, hopeless, and damnable. If you feel that you are lost, you do not feel too strongly, you are in the true light where God will meet with you. The Lord will not consent to meet with you on the ground that you are not much of a sinner and that after all your sin is not a great evil. No, He will meet you where the truth is and nowhere else. When you confess that you are unworthy of His pity, you are acknowledging the truth. And when you feel guilty, you feel what is really a fact. On this footing of truth, sad truth though it is, the Lord will meet with you through the atoning blood. It is in

your vileness that sovereign grace over sin abounding will come to you and cleanse you. Therefore, the sooner you come to the honest truth, the better for you, for the sooner you will obtain joy and peace through believing in Christ. The text means just this—Treat God truthfully and He will treat you truthfully. Make no pretensions before God, but lay bare your soul. Let Him see it as it is and then He will be faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Mark the beauty of that expression—God will deal with you in *faithfulness*. His nature is mercy and you, naturally, expect that if you confess your sin to a merciful God, He will deal mercifully with you and be faithful to His nature. And He will be so. But He has also given a promise that if the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and turn unto the Lord, He will have mercy upon them—depend upon it—He will be faithful to His promise. The blood of Jesus Christ has made a full atonement and God will be faithful to that atonement. He will deal with you on the grounds of the covenant of grace, of which the sacrifice of Jesus is the seal and therein also He will be true to you.

What a blessing it is that the Lord will be faithful and just in the cleansing of you from all the sinfulness of your nature. I pray you deal honestly with God and say to Him, “Cleanse me, O God, from secret faults. You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden parts, You will make me know wisdom. Purge me, therefore, O Lord, and I shall be clean.” Suppose you go to a surgeon because you have some deadly polyp or cancer growing in you? You need to have it removed and you know there are a great many physicians who will profess to cure such things, but in reality only give temporary ease. From all these you keep clear. You are well aware that if only a little root of the growth should be left, it will grow again. So you say outright to the surgeon, “Sir, here is my disease. I will tell you all the symptoms of it—I only ask to have a thorough cure, cost me what it may in money or pain. I make no reserve. Do just whatever you think is best in the case, but make clean work of it. If you have the knife in your hand, do not spare it out of pity for my pain, but be just with me, cut out the disease, roots and all, so that it may be a complete cure.” Even in the same manner, go to the Lord, and say, “Lord, here is my sin, I confess it all. Do not suffer me to have any peace unless it is true peace. Do not let me have any comfort unless I get it from Christ. And if there must be more conviction of sin and more alarm of conscience—if there must be deeper gashes and sterner cuts into my soul, Lord, do not spare me—be pleased to purge me from the secret depravity of my nature and make me pure. Your holiness is what I crave after and I cannot be satisfied till You make me holy, even as You are holy.” This is the way to plead with God and the only way. Confess the sin and then He will be faithful and just to give you the double cure, namely, first, the forgiveness, and next, the cleansing from all unrighteousness.

Now, there are still some who say, “Well, yes, I think I could go to God in that way, sir, but oh, my past sins prevent me. I could tell Him I am sinful; I could ask Him to renew my nature; I could lay myself bare before Him, but oh, my past sins. All might yet be well if I had not so sinned.” Ah, my brethren, that brings out a third course which lies before you, which I hope you will not follow, namely, *to deny actual sin*. The very thing, which I bless God, you cannot do would seal your doom, for it would lead you to make God a liar, and so His Word could not abide in you. If you felt able to say, “I have not sinned,” in proportion as you said, that would put yourself out of the light in which God alone can walk with you. Some get to that point by saying that what they did was not really sin to any extent, or at any rate, if it would have been sin in other people; it was not sin in them. Considering their strong passions, they wonder they were not worse. And considering the circumstances of their case, they do not see how they could have done otherwise. In a word, they have not sinned at all. There is another class who say, “All these commandments have I kept from my youth up, what do I lack?” This self-justification clearly makes God a liar. For what does the cross of Calvary mean? What do those streams of blood mean? What do those agonies to the death mean? God has acted out a gigantic lie if we have no sin, for He has provided a propitiation for a thing which does not exist. O hideous profanity! O vile blasphemy, thus to insinuate that the great sacrifice of divine love was an acted falsehood! Brethren, we have sinned, sinned far beyond anything we know—and the only wise and true way is to confess it before God.

I find the first part of my subject has occupied much more time than I thought and therefore, I will be exceedingly brief upon the second head.

II. LET US NOW CONSIDER HOW WE CAN FOLLOW THIS COURSE, which is the only right and acceptable one, namely, *to confess our sin*. I suppose I am speaking to those who are in earnest

about their salvation. O my friends lay bare your consciences before the law of God. Go and open the 20th chapter of Exodus and read the Ten Commandments. Think of their *spirituality*—remember how he that looks on a woman to lust after her commits adultery with her in his heart—and let the law, with all its blaze of light, flash flame into your soul. Do not shirk the facts or shrink from knowing their full force, but feel the power of the condemning law. Then recollect your individual sins. Recall them one by one—those greater sins, those huge blots upon your character—do not try to forget them. If you have forgotten them, raise them from the grave and think them over and feel them as your own sins. Do not lay them at the door of anyone else. Do not look at circumstances in order to find alleviation for your guilt, but set them in the light of God's countenance. Remember, the sins of your holy things, your Sabbath sins, your sanctuary sins, your sins against the Bible, your sins against prayer, and your sins against the love of the Father, the blood of Christ, and the strivings of the Spirit. Oh, how many are these! Think of your sins of omission, your failures in duty, and your shortcomings in spirit. Repent of what you have done and what you have not done. How both these forms of iniquity may stagger and humble you!

Think of your sins of heart. How cold has that heart been towards your Savior. Your sins of thought, how wrongly your mind has often judged. And your sins of imagination; what filthy creatures your imagination has portrayed in lively colors on the wall. Think of all the sins of your desires and delights, and hopes and fears. What faculty is there that has not been defiled? "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." We are bound to confess the aggravations of our sin, how we sinned against light, and against knowledge, against conscience, and against divine love, against the monitions of the Holy Spirit, against tender warnings which came from His gentle voice. Oh, when some of us err, every ounce of our sin has as much evil in it as a ton of other men's sins. Let us take care that we confess all. And then let us try to see the heinousness of all sin as an offense against a kind, good, loving God—as sin against a perfect law intended for our good. Let us remember our wanton sins, our mischievous sins, sins which hurt ourselves, foolish sins, despicable sins into which our spirits have descended even though we have known the nobility of holiness and had some fellowship with God. I beseech you, dear hearer, try to fix your eyes on Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice and live as a believer in Him, and this will make you live as a constant confessor of sin. For when the wounds of Jesus speak peace, they also preach penitence. And when the atonement gives us rest, it also makes us meek and lowly in heart under a sense of abiding faultiness. As you see what Jesus suffered, you will see how you sinned. And as you observe the glory of His merit, you will see the horror of your own demerit. Thus may you daily, as long as you live, confess sin and find cleansing from all unrighteousness.

III. LET US CONSIDER WHY WE SHOULD CONFESS SIN. I shall say, first, do so because *it is right*. Religious lie-telling is a dreadful thing and there is plenty of it. If I could be saved by masking my condition before God, I would not like to be saved in that way. The man whose heart is in the light loves to do right. It would be a great dishonor to God to suppose it possible that He will save us in any manner which would not accord with truth. It is right that we should come before God, as we are, and plead for mercy through Jesus Christ, and therefore, let us do it.

Moreover, upon some of us it is imperative, because *we cannot do anything else*. There may possibly be a person here who could say, "I have no sin." But I could not. Why, if I were to claim innocence, either of nature or practice, the words would choke me. Say I have no sin! I should expect to turn black in the face and fall down dead; it would be so gross a lie. To say I have no sin, why there is not one part of my whole nature but what would protest against such an assertion! I have to come to God as a sinner, I cannot help it. And I would to God that everyone in this place felt they had to, too, for it is the intent and design of the law to convict the sinner in order that he may be compelled to accept salvation on free grace terms through Jesus Christ. You can never catch a fish in a net while there is one mesh through which he can escape, but when all the meshes are so small that the fish cannot get out, then we have taken him. When you are such a sinner that you cannot plead that you have no sin, nor yet that you have not sinned, but are quite convicted to be saved by grace, then you are in Christ's net and He will lift you out—and the Fisher of Men shall have cause to rejoice.

Besides, beloved friends, suppose we have tried to appear before God what we are not, *God has not been deceived*, for He is not mocked. We may set up a very respectable character to please ourselves and give it a few touches every now and then, just to set it off and improve it. And we may even find a num-

ber of people to join with us to form a mutual admiration society and our friends may cheerfully hear us talk about what wonderful beings we are, provided we will sit and hear them glorify themselves in return—but neither with one witness nor a thousand witnesses will our boasts be one jot more true, or likely to be believed in heaven. God is not misled. He looks at all boasters of their own purity and says, “When you say you have no sin, you make Me a liar, and My word is not in you, for if the truth were in you, you would know that sin is in you. And if My word were in you, you would also confess that you have sinned and humble yourselves before Me.”

I exhort you, sinner, to give up all your attempts to feel right and to be right before coming to God in Christ Jesus. Have you not made a great failure of it already? You thought you were getting right for Christ, but just then you fell in the worst possible way. You have been trying to repair your old clothes and make yourself respectable before coming to Christ, but every time you have touched the garment the tear has grown worse. Give up all attempts to prepare for grace and come to Jesus Christ just as you are. When you have been trying to make yourself feel that you are right and proper for Christ, you have been sinning against God, for you have been flying in the teeth of His witness, which is that Jesus Christ came, not to save the righteous, but sinners. In proportion as you try to make yourself out to be righteous, you have denied the testimony of God. May the Spirit of God help you to come to your heavenly Father on the ground of truth, confessing that you have sinned—that is the truth for you, and on the ground that Christ died for sinners—that is the truth on God’s side which enables Him to smile on sinners.

Now, what is your state this morning? Are you cold as an iceberg as to divine things? Come and tell the Lord you are an iceberg and let Him thaw you. What is your state—hard as a rock, or like a nether millstone? Is there no feeling? Come and tell the Lord that you do not feel. Oh, is there no trace of any good feeling in you? Come to my Lord without a trace of feeling and tell Him just what you are. And oh, if you can dare to say, over the head of all your sin and sinfulness, “Nevertheless, I rest myself on the blood that cleanses from all sin and I beseech You, O Lord, seeing I confess my sin, to cleanse me from all unrighteousness,” you will find Him faithful and just to do it. Come as the citizens of Calais did to King Edward III when the city was captured—come with ropes about your neck, admitting that if sentence were executed upon you, you deserve it. Come at once in all your filthiness and nakedness—come with no jewels in your ears, with no ornaments upon your necks, and with no recommendation whatever—come as sinners by nature and as sinners by practice. Plead nothing that looks like goodness, but come in your sin. Do not try to put one touch of paint on those cheeks of yours, nor imitate the flush of health upon that consumptive countenance. Come as you are and say, “Lord, look at me as I am, a worse sinner than even I think myself to be, and then show the infinity of Your free grace, and the power of Jesus’ dying love in saving me, even me.” Ah, my brethren, you will not be long without peace if you draw near to God in that fashion. Fling away any preparations, fitness, commendations, and hopefulness, and take my Lord Jesus, as empty-handed sinners take Him. Meet Him just as He is and just as you are. God will deal with you truthfully. He will never cast away a sinner that comes to Him according to truth. For my own part, I mean to come to Him as a sinner always. I know I am saved, but I never hope to get one inch beyond that verse—“The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son cleanses me from all sin,” for only so can I walk in the light as He is in the light.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 JOHN 1, 2:1-11.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—176, 51, 551.**

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